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When are public apologies ‘successful’? Focus on British and French apology press uptakes



Clyde Ancarno ^{a,b,*}

^a *Cardiff School of English, Communication and Philosophy, Cardiff University, John Percival Building, Colum Drive, Cardiff CF10 3EU, United Kingdom*

^b *Present address: King's College London, Department of Education & Professional Studies, Waterloo Bridge Wing, Franklin-Wilkins Building, Waterloo Road, London SE1 9NH, United Kingdom*

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Abstract

Public apologies are one of the most prominent examples of migration of speech acts from the private to the public sphere and now commonly feature in a wide range of public and media settings. Judging by the last two decades, the act of public apology is clearly in the process of social change, although perhaps more particularly in English-speaking cultures. The paper inscribes itself in a growing and vigorous literature on public apologies and public apology processes and aims to reveal public apology felicity conditions as represented by newswriters. Their scripts reporting what successful public apologies are or should be are therefore investigated using a corpus of over 200 apology press uptakes (reactions to public apologies in the press or ‘metalinguistic discussion’, [Davies, 2011](#)) taken from popular and quality British newspapers spanning a one-year period (207 articles). A smaller comparable French dataset (61 articles) is also included for contrastive purposes. Explicitly evaluative metapragmatic comments identified in these two corpora of apology press uptakes are the main source of data. The apology felicity conditions identified in the discourse of these comments in the British press are presented in the form of a ‘model’. The latter is interpreted in the light of Olshtain and Cohen’s widely-recognized apology speech act set ([Olshtain and Cohen, 1983](#); [Olshtain, 1989](#)).

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1. Introduction

The public apology phenomenon is particularly suitable for linguistic analysis as it provides ‘media texts or practices where language is itself more or less explicitly thematized’ ([Johnson and Ensslin, 2007:6](#)) and offers invaluable insights into politeness in the public sphere. There is a wide range of ways in which linguists can examine this phenomenon. The present paper adopts a pragmatic focus, using explicitly evaluative metapragmatic comments (henceforth ‘explicit comments’) identified in two corpora of apology press uptakes to access overt representations of the felicity conditions of public apologies. In other words, I aim to capture newswriters’ explicit beliefs about public apologies and hence assess their collective construction of ‘a set of features that are more or less essential to the apology speech act’ ([Jeffries, 2007:49](#)). Owing to this aim, a qualitative discourse analytic approach is adopted to interpret the data.

* Correspondence to: Department of Education & Professional Studies, Waterloo Bridge Wing, Franklin-Wilkins Building, Waterloo Road, London, SE1 9NH, UK. Tel.: +44 (0)20 7848 3272.

E-mail address: clyde.ancarno@kcl.ac.uk

2. Literature review

Apology research has grown in importance over the past two decades. Despite the inherently mediatized (here understood as ‘mediated by the media’, [Verdoolaege, 2009](#)) nature of public apologies (see [Fetzer and Weizman, 2006](#); [Clayman and Heritage, 2002](#); [Fairclough, 1998](#); [Harris et al., 2006:720](#); [McNeill et al., 2014](#)), relatively little research into media representations/uptakes of public apologies has been carried out (with the exceptions of, [Harris et al., 2006](#); [Jeffries, 2007](#); [Kampf, 2009](#); [Davies, 2011](#)). The media can decide to support or criticize public apologies, hence having significant impact on the general public’s perception of public apologies ([Davies, 2011:199](#)). Apology research also includes numerous discussions regarding the formulation of apologies, with particular emphasis on the distinction between ‘offers of apology’ and ‘sorry-based expressions’. Robinson, for example, argues that ‘explicit’ apologies include sorry-based units of talk (e.g. I’m sorry) and offers of apology ([Robinson, 2004:293](#)). In the same vein, [Jeffries \(2007\)](#) and [Harris et al. \(2006:720–723\)](#) suggest that an explicit IFID (and acceptance of responsibility) are critical in political apologies. However, expressions of sorrow are often portrayed as a way out of apologizing, or a way of avoiding the consequences of an explicit apology. The premise in this paper is that public apologies, even more than private apologies, require that researchers use real life evaluators of apologies to determine what counts as a public apology, i.e. distance themselves from conventional and prescriptive understandings of apologies. This pragmatic focus is echoed in many studies (e.g. [Thomas, 1995](#); [Davies et al., 2007:41](#); [Jeffries, 2007:12](#)) and emphasizes the need for public apologies to count as apologies for recipients, rather than follow a set of rules. In apology research, apologies are perceived as an essentially hearer-supportive speech act (e.g. [Edmondson and House, 1981](#)). However, speaker-supportive approaches to speech acts have been upheld by social psychologists (e.g. [Meier, 1998](#)) and applied to public apologies (e.g. [Page, 2014](#) on apologizers’ concern in saving their face in online corporate apologies). This has led [Davies et al. \(2007\)](#) to question how costly apologies are to the speaker while others usefully highlight that public apologies may inherently be used to maintain or restore apologizers’ reputation.

Most studies on apology felicity conditions focus on the private sphere. [Austin \(1962\)](#), who first advanced the notion of felicity condition, distinguished between ‘essential’, ‘sincerity’ and ‘preparatory’ conditions. This was applied to apologies by [Owen \(1983:117–122\)](#) putting particular emphasis on sincerity. Apology taxonomies are multifarious (e.g. [Marrus, 2007:79](#); [Abadi, 1990](#); [Meier’s review 1998:222–224](#); [Jeffries’ prototypical public apology taxonomy 2007:53](#)) and their usefulness is sometimes questioned. Meier, for example, suggests they tend to obscure the ‘variability and creativity present in apology behavior’ (1998:225) and [Holmes \(1990\)](#) highlights ‘the impossibility of defining a speech act set which would account for all apologies’. The public apology felicity conditions model presented in this paper is examined in the light of [Olshtain and Cohen’s general descriptive apology model](#). The latter is based on [Fraser’s 9 strategies for apologizing \(1980\)](#) and ‘sets out to encompass the potential range of apology strategies, any of which [...] may count as an apology’ ([Blum-Kulka et al., 1989:20](#)). This model focuses on conditions concerning the textual aspects of the apology and hence does not include cognition or situation-related conditions ([Jeffries, 2007:50](#)). This model (outlined below) underpins many (if not the majority of) apology models ([Harris et al., 2006:721](#)):

Two general strategies

- 1) An expression of apology (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device/IFID)
 - a) an expression of regret (e.g. I’m sorry)
 - b) an offer of apology (e.g. I apologize)
 - c) a request for forgiveness (e.g. excuse me, forgive me)
- 2) An acknowledgement of responsibility for the offence (e.g. It’s my fault)

Three situation-specific strategies

- 2) An offer of repair/redress (e.g. I’ll pay for your damage)
 - 3) An explanation or an account of the situation (e.g. I missed the bus)
 - 5) A promise of forbearance (e.g. I’ll never forget it again)
- (adapted from [Olshtain, 1989](#))

Two ways of accessing the felicity conditions of public apologies can be distinguished: firstly, through investigations into what was said (focus on ‘apology formulation’); secondly, through media representations of successful apologies (focus on ‘apology interpretation’). This paper adopts the latter approach. This supports [Thomas \(1995:204–205\)](#) who argues that ‘explicit commentary by someone other than the speaker’ (e.g. metapragmatic comments and apology press uptakes) can be used as forms of evidence to identify speech acts. Focus on press uptakes, including aspects of ideological positioning, also echoes the aims and scope of discourse analytic research, and illustrates a now widespread desire among discourse analysts not to impose their interpretation but to use instead real-life interpretations of the data:

In drawing upon metalinguistic comment to explore apologies, we are effectively assessing a wider range of cultural judgments from language users rather than just that of the analyst.
(Davies, 2011:190; 193–194)

Research into evaluation, stance and appraisal is vast (e.g. Jaffe, 2009; Englebretson, 2007) and clearly relevant to this paper which focuses on explicit comments. Evaluation is used here to refer to the expression of the newswriters' 'attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about' the apology under scrutiny (Hunston and Thompson, 2000:5). I see these comments as defined in primarily dichotomous terms, e.g. as 'more or less positive/negative, important/unimportant, expected/unexpected, comprehensible/incomprehensible, possible/impossible, serious/funny, genuine/fake' etc. (Bednarek, 2005). Explicitly evaluative comments are passages where newswriters' evaluative stance on the success of apologies is perceptible. In these passages, newswriters explicitly attempt 'to influence/negotiate how an utterance is or should have been heard or try to modify the values attributed to it' (Jaworski et al., 2004:4). In the corpora such comments concerned, for example, the wording of public apologies and the performance of the public figure apologizing. Issues pertaining to the identification of evaluation in discourse are mentioned recurrently in the literature on evaluation. A distinction was therefore drawn between explicitly and implicitly evaluative metapragmatic comments. The latter were excluded from the analyses presented here, hence the emphasis on the fact that the public apology felicity condition model introduced focuses on 'overt' felicity conditions represented by newswriters. This echoes Martin and White (2005) who recognize that stance can be conveyed both explicitly and implicitly, depending on the type of discourse (also see Pounds, 2010 on stance variation depending on the type or section of a press publication). In both corpora explicitly evaluative stance-taking is limited, which may be predicted from the predominantly fact-focused, as opposed to opinion-focused, articles in the corpora (Bednarek, 2006; Iedema et al., 1994).

A broad definition of media discourse as 'a totality of how reality is represented in broadcast and printed media from television to newspaper' (O'Keeffe, 2006:1) is upheld in this paper and daily newspapers are perceived to have the potential to reinforce common discourses of accountability (Buttny, 1999) and ideologies, while also contributing to construct new ones or to transform existing ones. This correlates with the widespread view in ideology research that (i) discursive processes shaping the news are necessarily ideological (e.g. Bell and Garrett, 1998; Philo, 2007; Cotter, 2010) and that (ii) dominant discourses or ideologies 'prompt' or 'are' particular versions of reality (e.g. Luke, 2002). However, public apologies are also often portrayed as being used to avoid accountability in apology press uptakes and Coicaud and Jönsson (2008:88), for example, suggest that they can replace accountability or act as a 'low form of accountability'. The effect of political inclination on news reporting was not considered in this paper, owing to the limited size of the corpus and research having questioned the traditional view that linguistic patterns of news texts vary in accordance with the political leaning of newspapers and their affiliation with the popular or quality press (e.g. Jaworski, 1994; Bednarek, 2006). The concept of 'news value' (Bell, 1991; originally identified by Galtung and Ruge, 1965) is drawn upon to analyze the press uptakes. The prominence of negativity in news data is a well-documented phenomenon (e.g. Bednarek, 2006; Bednarek and Caple, 2010 on negativity in environmental news stories in the Australian press). However, the unpredictable way public apologies are represented by the media is also recognized (Jeffries, 2007) and is evidence of the news-value-driven nature of many press uptakes.

Many types of corpus investigations exist and there are significant differences and/or overlaps between e.g. 'corpus-driven', 'corpus-assisted' and 'corpus-based' studies. The methodology utilized is corpus-assisted discourse analysis which can arguably be defined as research utilizing the tools and concepts of corpus linguistics to explore and familiarize us with the discourses at hand (what Lee, 2008:88 refers to as 'corpus-informed'). Although traditional outputs generated by corpus tools are not considered (e.g. word frequencies, collocations), the approach is nonetheless considered to be corpus-assisted in that it brings together two very different, but theoretically compatible areas of linguistics—corpus linguistics and pragmatics. Claims suggesting that studies in pragmatics over-rely on a small number of single (and often de-contextualized) example(s) are outdated and fail to reflect the diversity of pragmatics research. Pragmatics studies using large samples of texts clearly illustrate this. The publication of the *Yearbook of Corpus Linguistics and Pragmatics* edited by Romero-Trillo (2013) shows, for example, that the relevance of combining corpus linguistics and pragmatics is rapidly gaining in recognition. Deutschmann (2003), in that regard, is one of the very few studies having conducted a corpus-based investigation into apologies (he used the spoken part of the BNC corpus).

3. Data and methodology

The choice of apology was motivated by the fact that it has comparatively few surface realizations in formal/semi-formal written English (and French), making it more readily identifiable using electronic techniques than other more commonly used speech acts.

The term *apology*, as employed in this paper, refers to complete apologies, partial apologies and refusals to apologize. Apologies are therefore understood to be any apologetic speech act or act of contrition treated as an instance of apology

Table 1
Newspapers in the corpus.

British	French
<i>The Daily Mirror/The Sunday Mirror</i> (tabloid)	<i>Le Monde</i> (broadsheet)
<i>The Guardian/The Observer</i> (broadsheet)	<i>L'Humanité</i> (broadsheet)
<i>The Independent/Independent on Sunday</i> (broadsheet)	<i>Le Figaro</i> (broadsheet)
<i>The Times/The Sunday Times</i> (broadsheet)	<i>Libération</i> (broadsheet)
<i>The Daily Telegraph/The Sunday Telegraph</i> (broadsheet)	<i>Aujourd'hui en France</i> (near tabloid)
<i>The Daily Mail/The Mail on Sunday</i> (middle-market tabloid)	
<i>The Sun</i> (tabloid)	

in the press.¹ This definition also acknowledges the degree of compliance of public apologies with the situation at hand, particularly in the case of public apologies which are represented as a refusal to apologize by one newspaper but as a successful apology by another. An example of contradictory uptakes is found in (1–2) below which respectively suggest that Pope Benedict XVI did not apologize for his remarks on Islam (1) and that he did apologize/said 'sorry' (2).

- (1) [The Pope's apology for his remarks on Islam]
THE POPE spoke yesterday of his sadness about the reaction to his comments about Islam but **stopped short of apologizing**.
(Mail on Sunday 17 September 2006)
- (2) [The Pope's apology for his remarks on Islam]
THE POPE **said "sorry"** yesterday to the world's Muslims if his comments on Islam were misinterpreted and upset them.
(Sunday Mirror 17 September 2006)

This underlines that media presuppositions are constrained by the political/ideological positioning of newspapers and need to be viewed in context. The latter includes contextual factors specific to apology news stories such as the social context in which apologies are delivered, whether or not an apology was preceded by a demand for apology.

The topic of 'comparability of corpora' is solidly established in the corpus linguistics literature (e.g. [Moreno, 2008](#); [Kilgariff, 2001, 2012](#)). Sources for the British and French corpora were therefore selected with care and data collection was motivated by comparability rather than availability. This was achieved by focusing on the same time period, 1 July 2006–30 June 2007. Newspapers were chosen to ensure comparability although there is no French equivalent of the genre of tabloid newspaper in France. A 'near tabloid', *Aujourd'hui en France*, however, was included. Search terms used to gather both corpora were also comparable. These are prototypical apology formulations in English and French and the terms used were 'excus!', 'pardon' and 'désolé!' for the French sub-corpus (based on prominent research on apologies in French by [Kerbrat-Orecchioni \(2001:129–130\)](#); and 'apolog!' (note that '!' indicates a wildcard) and 'sorry' for the British one (based on [Aijmer's 1996](#) list of prototypical apology formulations). Although not equivalent from a lexical point of view, these terms are considered to ensure corpus comparability, and correspond to the most prototypical ways of apologizing in both languages. Since two languages are examined, strict correlation between the search terms was impossible and seemingly equivalent expressions in different languages can have very different implications ([Trouillot, 2000:174](#)). Despite these inevitable caveats, the corpus collection method guarantees that all articles where a public speech act was discussed as an apology were identified. Rather than being strictly lexically comparable, the corpora compare in terms of the discourse genre they represent: apology press uptakes. Nexis, an online newspaper database was used to collect the corpus. Search terms were looked for in the headlines and lead paragraphs and the articles returned were then sieved to discard articles which were not representative of the genre. The corpus therefore comprises 268 public apology press uptakes: 207 from British newspapers and 61 from French newspapers. The French apology press uptakes are evidently fewer than the British ones but will nonetheless be used for contrastive purposes. The texts span the political spectrum and are hard-news reporting articles, videlicet articles where the objective rather than subjective voice of the reporter is expected to prevail ([Iedema et al., 1994](#)). The uptakes cover a total of 34 news stories: 26 in the British sub-corpus and 21 in the French sub-corpus (13 are common to both subcorpora). The newspapers searched through in Nexis are listed in [Table 1](#).

¹ This can be linked to the interesting issue of equivocality, insofar as a partial apology may be seen as equivocal and a complete apology as unequivocal. The degree of equivocality is sometimes explicitly mentioned in apology press uptakes.

Explicit comments were identified by means of systematic manual coding assisted by qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. In both corpora they have a bearing on 'specific' as well as 'general' public apologies, as illustrated by the examples of explicit comments below. Thus (3) communicates views on public apologies in general, whereas (4) focuses on Blair's (specific) apology for the Slave Trade.

- (3) [Delarue for aggressive behaviour – Le Monde 03.04.07]
L'art consiste à s'excuser au bon moment. Franchement, carrément. [The skill consists of apologizing at the right time. Frankly, explicitly.]
- (4) [Blair for slavery (negative evaluation/explicit criticism) – The Guardian 01.12.06]
Given his reputation for saying sorry at the drop of a hat, it is interesting to note that *he has hardly ever actually apologized for anything. He claimed to have apologized* for the lies about WMD in Iraq, for which he is widely held responsible, but *never actually uttered the penitent words. He did say sorry for the Bernie Ecclestone scandal*, in which it was alleged that his government exempted formula-one motor racing from its ban on tobacco sponsorship in return for a donation to the Labour party, *but at the same time vehemently denied the allegation. So his only full-fledged apology was for nothing at all.*

There are 28 explicit comments in the British sub-corpus and five in the French sub-corpus, a discrepancy which predominantly reflects the smaller number of newspaper articles in the French sub-corpus.

Newswriters' public apology felicity conditions were identified by reviewing the explicit comments. This procedure was data-driven, i.e. the broad general question 'Which belief(s) about what constitutes a successful apology is/are evidenced here?' was used to isolate relevant passages in the explicit comments.

4. Data analysis

The analysis of the newswriters' explicit comments is organized thematically for the British sub-corpus and by apology story for the French sub-corpus.

4.1. Explicit comment in the British sub-corpus – analysis

Explicit comments in the British sub-corpus appear in 12 news stories.² An important feature of these explicit comments is that they are used almost exclusively to convey negative uptakes of apologies. These range from virulent to very subtle instances of criticism and thus play an important role in the presentation of unfavourable uptakes. As a matter of fact, the only evidence of positive evaluation in explicit comments in the British sub-corpus is related to the Pope's apology for his remarks on Islam and is presented in (5):

- (5) [The Pope for his remarks on Islam (positive evaluation of the Pope's apology embedded in negative evaluation) – The Daily Mirror 24.09.06]
I THINK the Pope should stop apologizing. How many times does he have to say sorry to appease Muslim extremists?

4.1.1. Understanding the context of comments and negativity

(5) requires familiarity with the context of the Pope's apology, for the journalist is referring to two apologies the Pope had to issue following his remarks on Islam, while others were also issued by members of his staff. However, a correct interpretation of (5) requires further contextualization. As with many apologies, the Pope's apologies were issued following demands for apologies. Demands, here, are represented to have emanated from 'Muslim extremists'. It therefore appears that this rare example of positive evaluation is effectively embedded in a negative evaluation of the apologizees. The perspective on the identity of apologizees is clearly reductionist, subjective and ideological in that the apologizees include Muslims other than 'Muslim extremists' and people with other or no faiths. The surfacing of the noun 'extremists' therefore echoes research concerned with revealing particular otherization processes Muslims and Arabs are the targets of (e.g. Baker et al., 2013). Insofar as (5) seems to be both about commenting on offences which do and do not

² Big Brother for racism; Tony Blair for slavery; Blue Peter for phone-in issue; British Navy crisis; Bryan Ferry for anti-Semitism; Mel Gibson for anti-Semitism; Patricia Hewitt for issue concerning junior doctor; Mike Newell for sexism; Pope Benedict XVI for remarks on Islam; John Prescott for adultery; Bertie Ahern for donations; Zinedine Zidane for headbutt.

warrant an apology and the expression of the journalist's opinion that the apologizees do not deserve an apology, the positivity of the uptake is questionable. This demonstrates, however, that the 'negativity news value' is privileged by newswriters in the British sub-corpus, hence highlighting a possible correlation between explicit comments and negativity. This is in support of Davies' (2011:195) claims that 'in evaluating other's speech, people tend to comment more on perceived failures and omissions rather than felicitous choices'.

4.1.2. Formulation of apologies

British newswriters' assumptions concerning what constitutes an appropriate apology formulation indicate that they believe public apologies should be conveyed by 'offers of apology' and 'sorry-based expressions' although the latter are sometimes seen as insufficient. This is illustrated in the headline from *The Daily Telegraph* in (6) on Tony Blair's apology for the slave trade. Although this excerpt admittedly reports third parties' views, it portrays the unsupportive stance in the article it is taken from.

- (6) [Blair for slavery (headline) – *The Daily Telegraph* 28.11.06]
Blair's deep sorrow for slavery '*is not enough*'. Critics say that Britain must pay a heavy price for its past.

Inversely, certain unreserved apologies are considered to be 'true' apologies. This is indicated in (12):

- (7) [Blair for slavery – *The Guardian* 27.11.06]
Tony Blair is to express Britain's *profound sorrow* over the slave trade, but *will not give an unreserved apology* for fear it will lead to *claims for reparations* from descendants of Africans sold into slavery.

(7) emphasizes the newswriter's view that Blair's historical apology required an 'unreserved' apology. This therefore implies that the felicity of explicit offers of apology is accrued when modified by positively connoted lexical items (here '*unreserved*').

References to the wording of apologies are also frequent (e.g. (8–10) and Davies, 2011:199 on the inevitable pre-planned nature of public apologies).

- (8) [The Pope for his remarks on Islam – *The Guardian* 19.09.06]
Even more bewildering is the fact that his choice of quotation from Manuel II Paleologos, the 14th- century Byzantine emperor, was so insulting of the Prophet. Even the most cursory knowledge of dialogue with Islam teaches – and as a Vatican Cardinal, Pope Benedict XVI would have learned this long ago - that reverence for the Prophet is a non-negotiable. What unites all Muslims is a passionate devotion and commitment to protecting the honour of Muhammad. Given the scale of the offence, the *carefully worded apology*, actually, gives little ground; he recognizes that Muslims have been offended and that he was only quoting, but there is no regret at using such an inappropriate comment or the deep historic resonances it stirs up.
- (9) [British Navy crisis (Browne's apology for allowing the selling of stories) – *The Daily Mail* 17.04.07]
Of Mr Browne's statement? Did it constitute an honest apology?
Or, to use his language, even 'a degree of' an apology? Being Mr Browne, being this lawyer, *everything was phrased with care*.
- (10) [Ferry for anti-Semitism – *The Times* 17.04.07]
Not unpredictably, there has been a bit of a fuss about this. Now, Ferry has "apologized unreservedly for any offence caused", (*careful wording, that*) insisting that the comments were made from an "art history perspective" and that he has no political love of the far Right. Although he is pretty keen on the Countryside Alliance.
(Joke. Don't write in.)

The metalinguistic comments captured in (8–10) further indicate newswriters' awareness to the attention given by public apologizers to word choices and how this is critical to ensure their success. These examples (see parts in italics) encourage readers to think that the careful wording was motivated by a desire to 'dodge' the apology, i.e. they are key in conveying negative uptakes. In (8) the Pope's apology is portrayed as having 'little ground' because it did not include an expression of regret, whereas (9) refers to Browne saying he had expressed 'a degree of regret that can be equated with an apology'. (10) highlights the apparent contradiction between Ferry apologizing unreservedly for any offence he caused while excusing himself—and therefore questioning the offence—saying his comments were made from an 'art history perspective'. This and other strategies discussed subsequently echo Kampf (2009) on the strategies public apologizers use to minimize their responsibility for misdeeds. In (10), we may argue that we are faced with an 'apology without an offense' (Kampf, 2009:2263)

The news media also appear to make specific presuppositions on which forms of account enhance or undermine the felicity of apologies, as suggested in (11).

- (11) [British Navy crisis (Browne's apology for selling of stories; explanation) – The Times 17.04.07]
Des Browne admitted that he had made a "mistake" in the naval captives' cash-for-stories debacle. He admitted very little more. He expressed regret that his handling of the affair had brought Britain's Armed Forces into disrepute, *but he attempted to excuse himself by saying that the decision was made in good faith*. He accepted responsibility for what happened, *but gave only the barest explanation of why such a decision was taken*.

What the newswriter perceives as a form of excusing behaviour in Des Browne's apology³ is represented as an undermining factor. Browne is portrayed as attempting to minimize the offence by suggesting that it was 'made in good faith'. The second passage in italics, on the other hand, indicates that the newswriter is skeptical, on the grounds that the apology did not provide enough explanation as to why the offence occurred. Alternatively, this may indicate that the newswriter considers explanations as a positive move in public apologies.

Overall it is noteworthy that newswriters' questions and assumptions about public apologizing echo debates regarding apology formulations in apology research literature.

4.1.3. Enhancing apology strategies

The strategies newswriters perceive public apologizers to be using to maximize the chances of felicity/success of their apologies (note that making the apology 'unreserved' can be seen as an enhancing apology strategy) are also apparent in the explicit comments. Emphasis on regret in certain public apology processes is noticeable in apologizers' attempt to enhance their chances of felicity. This 'method' can be observed in (8) (about the Pope's apology for his remarks on Islam). The absence of expression of regret in the Pope's act of contrition prompts the newswriter's criticism at the end of the extract. (8) represents explicit recognition of the alleged offence as another important means to enhance the success of public apologies. Denials of offence are therefore perceived to undermine public apologies. This applies to (12) which concerns Tony Blair's apology for the slave trade. Some of his other apologies are discussed (e.g. his disputed apology for the war on Iraq):

- (12) [Blair for slavery – The Guardian 01.12.06]
Given his reputation for saying sorry at the drop of a hat, it is interesting to note that he has hardly ever actually apologized for anything. He claimed to have apologized for the lies about WMD in Iraq, for which he is widely held *responsible*, but never actually uttered the penitent words.
He did say sorry for the Bernie Ecclestone scandal, in which it was alleged that his government exempted formula-one motor racing from its ban on tobacco sponsorship in return for a donation to the Labour party, *but at the same time vehemently denied the allegation*. So his only full-fledged apology was for nothing at all.

A set of context-bound felicity conditions also emerges from the explicit comments. For example, the newswriters' view that the timing of apologies is an important aspect of the success of public apologies surfaces in the British sub-corpus. This is especially true when the lexical items 'finally' and 'grudgingly' occur in the explicit comments as in (13–14).

- (13) [Ahern for cash donations (headline with capitals in original) – The Daily Mail 04.10.06]
Bertie *finally* says sorry (grudgingly); THE GREAT EVADER TAOISEACH ADMITS AN 'ERROR AND MISJUDGMENT' BUT STILL INSISTS THAT HE DID NOTHING WRONG ACCEPTING MONEY FROM BUSINESSMEN
- (14) [British Navy crisis (Browne's apology for the selling of stories) – The Guardian 17.04.07]
As mea culpas go, it was not exactly gushing. Des Browne, the defence secretary, having been nagged, cajoled and hectored, *finally* admitted to "a degree of regret that can be equated with an apology". *Pressed* to use the word "sorry", he said, *grudgingly*: "If you want me to say 'sorry', then I am happy to say 'sorry'." He said it in a very loud voice, which made it sound even less rueful.

(13) and (14) exemplify how *finally* and *grudgingly* can indicate a delay or reluctance in the delivery of the apology, and hence a negative uptake. Examples (13–14) imply that public apologies should be made quickly. Comments about the

³ This apology occurred as part of the British Navy crisis and regards the fact that Defence Secretary Des Browne, allowed the selling of stories by crew when they returned from Iran.

timing of public apologies also appear in press uptakes pertaining to historical apologies which can be issued centuries after the offence occurred.

The notion of a forced public apology is always equated with the apologizer's reluctance to deliver the apology and thus perceived to undermine the apology concerned. References to 'forced' public apologies are recurrent,⁴ as in the following comment:

- (15) [Gibson for anti-Semitism – The Independent 15.11.06]

Mel didn't choose to go on television because he wanted to appear across the land chatting about his family, his career or his seven children. *He was forced into this extraordinary act* to get his new film released. This act of "repentance" was step one in the marketing plan for his epic, *Apocalypto*. Over a year ago, Mel struck a lucrative distribution deal for the project with Disney, which owns ABC.

Forced apologies are therefore underpinned by the enhancing strategy according to which public apologies should be spontaneous.

4.1.4. Intention(s) of apologizers

Linguistics research is often very cautious in its claims regarding the intention of speakers and writers for it is often impossible to know what these speakers/writers had in mind. However, much negative framing of apologies identified in explicit comments finds its roots in newswriters' presupposing that certain intentions of public figures discredit apologies (Hill, 2007, 2008, cited in Davies, 2011:190, who uses metalanguage to explore how 'commentators judge the intent of the speaker'). For example, apologizers who are observed trying to avoid a full-blown apology (e.g. to save face or avoid legal liability; Mbaye, 2005 on 'fear of legal consequences' as a serious obstacle to apologies) are often portrayed negatively. References to litigation or reparation in particular suggest this. For example, Blair's use of a non-explicit apology formulation for slavery (16) is interpreted as a means to avoid legal claims and reparations:

- (16) [Blair for slavery – The Daily Mail 27.11.06]

There have been fears in Whitehall that a formal apology could open the way for legal claims and the payment of reparations to the descendants of slaves.

Here, the reference to reparations highlights media presuppositions concerning the consequences of public apologies, namely that apologizees can be entitled to receive financial compensation from the apologizer. The corpus suggests that other kinds of misdemeanour may lead to shaming, incarceration and dismissal. Public figures perceived to be using apologies to limit damage are therefore negatively framed. This applies to apologies for the Blue Peter phone-in scam or Mel Gibson's apologies for his anti-Semitic comments while drunk (17–18).

- (17) [Blue Peter for phone-in issue – The Guardian 15.03.07]

The BBC shifted into damage limitation mode yesterday. Richard Deverell, controller of BBC Children's Television, said: "The decision to put a child on air in this way was a serious error of judgment". Blue Peter presenter Konnie Huq last night told viewers: "We'd like to apologize to you because when this mistake happened we let you down".

- (18) [Gibson for anti-Semitism – The Daily Telegraph 02.08.06]

But the damage limitation exercise has apparently come too late to save Gibson's collaboration with ABC – a television mini-series based on the memoirs of a Dutch Jew who hid from the Nazis during the Second World War.

The preferred reading of these comments clearly supports a rejection of the apologies. In the same vein, apologies used by public figures to keep their jobs are also recurrently criticized (e.g. apologies by Des Browne, Mike Newell and Mel Gibson in (19–21)).

- (19) [British Navy crisis; Browne's apology for the selling of stories – The Times 17.04.07]

And, with some petulance, he told the Commons that if Members wanted him to say it, he was "happy" to say that he was sorry. *It was hardly the robust statement to save a tottering career. However, Mr Browne looks set to survive.*

⁴ In the British subcorpus, there were 30 occurrences of the stem *force* (covering *forced*, *forcing* for example) as a collocates of the stem *apolog-* (covering the nouns *apology*, *apologies* and the verb *apologize*).

- (20) [Newell for sexism – The Times 16.11.06]
Newell had plenty to say for himself after his team lost to Queens Park Rangers on Saturday, *but sorry seems to have been enough to save his £ 400,000 a-year job last night.*
- (21) [Gibson for anti-Semitism – The Independent 15.10.06]
He sat, pinned in his chair, a patch of sweat glistening through the thick makeup. The beard was gone, the crucifix he wears nowhere in sight. *Last Friday, Americans woke to the sight of the world's highest-earning actor trying to save his career by apologizing on national television.*

The three men's desire to keep their jobs is used to encourage readers to reject their apologies. A further example of how the media frown upon apologizers seeking to benefit themselves is observed below:

- (22) [Blair for slavery – The Daily Telegraph 29.11.06]
Expressing his “deep sorrow” for Britain's role in the slave trade, as he did this week, is the kind of empty, trendy grandstanding gesture that glamorises him and this generation at the expense of those who went before us.

(22) and other examples, indicate the apparent media belief that public apologies should be costly to the apologizer and highlight the unfoundedness of newswriters' focus on intention. This focus on intention is all the more surprising when, to some extent, most displays of public contrition can be loosely equated to exercises in public-image preservation and rarely consist of the idealized benchmark of unreserved heartfelt apologies many newswriters seem to rely upon in their uptakes.

Further evidence of the media's presupposition that public apologies should be costly to the apologizer is the suggestion that they are too easy. Blair's expression of ‘deep sorrow’ is not acceptable because it is ‘not enough’ (23) or because he apologizes too often (24).

- (23) [Blair for slavery (headline) – The Daily Telegraph 28.11.06]
Blair's deep sorrow for slavery 'is not enough' Critics say that Britain must pay a heavy price for its past.
- (24) [Blair for slavery (Blair's propensity to apologize) – The Guardian 01.12.06] – cited previously
Given his reputation for saying sorry at the drop of a hat, it is interesting to note that he has hardly ever actually apologized for anything.

These two examples suggest that Blair is not trustworthy. This echoes Davies' observation about the impact of our prior knowledge of an individual on our assessment of what they say:

[...] our assessment of individuals and their language is not just based on the immediate context. We bring to bear whatever knowledge we have of that person prior to this particular discursive moment'.
(Davies, 2011:190)

Despite the impossibility for newswriters to access the intentions of apologizers, these are used recurrently by newswriters to convey negative evaluations of apologies. Apologizers' intentions are clearly used to strengthen the preferred reading of newspaper articles, i.e. a rejection of the apology having been issued. Nonetheless, there is one rare example of a comment in a newspaper article using apologizers' intentions to positively evaluate an apology. This applies to a highly contested apology (both in popular and media spheres), namely Blair's expression of ‘deep sorrow’ for slavery. His apologetic performance is positively evaluated by *The Daily Mail* (25).

- (25) [Blair for slavery – The Daily Mail 27.11.06]
By aligning himself with campaigners who have long been pressing for western countries to apologize for their past failings, *Mr Blair hopes to win plaudits.*

Considering that Tony Blair's apology for slavery is public-official, the media's suggestion that he may have used it to favour his own positive face, i.e. ‘win plaudits’ (25), may appear more surprising than if he had issued a public-personal apology.⁵

⁵ The distinction between these two categories of public apologies was introduced by Lakoff (2001) who considers them both as examples of ‘one-off public apologies’ indicating a different relation of the apologiser to the offence. In the case of public-official apologies, the public figure apologizes on behalf of an institution (e.g. a nation state in Tony Blair's apology for the slave trade).

4.1.5. Responsibility

Explicit comments also signal that public figures should take responsibility in their apologies (see Harris et al., 2006:720–723 for similar findings). This explains the view that historical apologies are inherently flawed because the apologizer bears no responsibility. The way *The Daily Mirror* and *The Daily Mail* report Blair's apology for the slave trade is an illustration of this:

- (26) [Blair for slavery – The Daily Mirror 29.11.06]
TONY Blair has now expressed regret for Britain's involvement in the slave trade. Marvellous. *Although it's always better to apologize for something for which one is directly responsible.*
- (27) [Blair for slavery – The Daily Mail 27.11.06]
The statement marks the third time *Mr Blair has expressed regret for historical events for which he bears no responsibility*. In 1997, he expressed regret for Britain's role in the Irish famine of the 19th century. Last year, he apologized for the imprisonment of the Guildford Four, who were wrongly convicted of pub bombings when he was still student.
Both moves were widely seen as political manoeuvres to placate Irish republicans in the search for a peace deal in Northern Ireland.

This can be linked to newswriters' portrayal of the traditional view that apologies should be avoided because they are a sign of capitulation. This view is best summarized by the old maxim 'Never apologize and never explain', attributed to Benjamin Disraeli. This seems to permeate example (5). The view that Pope Benedict XVI should stop apologizing may therefore be seen as textual evidence of traditional conservative ideologies. Most of the overt conditions of apologies identified in explicit comments in the British sub-corpus suggest that the press consider apologies to be a difficult speech act to deliver. This is apparent in (28–29) where John Prescott's reluctance to apologize is incidentally used to reject his performance.

- (28) [Prescott for adultery – The Times 29.09.06]
For John Prescott, sorry has always been the hardest word. Yesterday was no exception, but he had no choice. I am sure that, when he had imagined his last conference speech, it was always a rabble-rousing triumph. Instead, it began with a whimper.
- (29) [Prescott for adultery – The Independent 01.01.06]
This Sunday, let's spare a moment's sympathy for *a real one-off in British politics. Not Mr Prescott, who finally managed to say sorry* to loyal party members in Manchester some months after he had been caught with his pants down and his hands up Tracey Temple's skirt, but his long-suffering wife.

4.2. Explicit comment in the French sub-corpus

This section contributes a few comments on the small set of explicit comments in the French sub-corpus. All but one of the five explicit comments in the French sub-corpus appear in an article published in *Le Monde* to cover Pope Benedict XVI's first public apology for his remarks on Islam. The other explicit comment concerns the French celebrity Jean-Luc Delarue's apology for assaulting staff aboard a plane, also published in *Le Monde*. I first explore the four comments in the article about the Pope's apology, then examine the remaining comment concerning Delarue's apology.

4.2.1. Pope's apology: contradiction, positive move and attending the apologizer's face

The article in *Le Monde* about the Pope's apology includes explicit comments which bear on public apologizing in general as well as the apology at hand. The explicit comments on apologizing in general draw attention to the contradictory nature of some uptakes. They are used primarily to convey the journalist's staunch defence of the Pope whom he presents as innocent, emphasizing that he should not apologize. The article suggests, for example, that those demanding an apology 'n'ont pas lu le texte qu'ils réprouvent [have not read the text they are disapproving of]', therefore representing the apologizees as misinformed and unreasonable in their request for an apology. It explicitly mentions 'ideology' to support its position, suggesting that the demands for an apology were disingenuous, i.e. more about attacking Western values and less about what the Pope originally said. (30), about apologizing in general, is the last sentence of the article and follows three references to apologies having been issued by French political figures: two successful apologies and one failure to apologize. It indicates the overwhelming assumption across the two corpora that public apologies are a positive move.

- (30) [The Pope for his remarks on Islam – Le Monde 19.09.06]
Présenter des excuses reviendrait pourtant à se présenter sous un meilleur jour. [To apologize would nonetheless cause her to present herself in a better light.]

The failure to apologize the newswriter alludes to is Martine Aubry's (female French politician) failure to apologize to Ségolène Royal (female presidential candidate in 2007), in that the former failed to apologize to Ségolène Royal for suggesting that her body shape would not allow her to win. References to public apologies other than the 'core' apology in press uptakes are common and, unlike in (30), usually intended to contribute to undermining the 'core' apology (e.g. references to light-hearted/humorous apologies are included to encourage an interpretation of the 'core' apology as preposterous). (30) also shows that public figures use apologies to attend to the apologizee's face as well as their own, a speaker-supportive perspective on apologies (e.g. Davies et al., 2007). The view that a speaker may benefit from public apologies is particularly clear if we compare (30) and (31). The former emphasizes how apologies can attend to the apologizer's own face, while the latter indicates how apologies can attend to the apologizee's face.

- (31) [The Pope for his remarks on Islam (general comment on apologizing) – Le Monde 19.09.06]
Présenter ses excuses sert à dénouer une crise. C'est un art difficile parce qu'il oblige à ravalier sa superbe. [To present one's apologies is a means to end a crisis. It is a difficult art which involves showing humility.]

The series of rhetorical questions situated in the lead paragraph of the article reproduced in (32) echo a much debated paradox, namely the fact that public apologizers do not always regret their actions or sometimes reject the suggestion that what they are apologizing for was an offence.

- (32) [The Pope for his remarks on Islam (general comment on apologizing) – Le Monde 19.09.06]
Faut-il toujours s'excuser ? Ou présenter ses regrets ? S'excuser d'avoir dit ce que l'on a dit même si on continue de le penser ? Présenter ses regrets même s'il n'y a rien à regretter ? [Is it always necessary to apologize? To offer one's regrets? To apologize for what was said even if one carries on thinking it? To offer one's regrets even if there is nothing to regret?]

4.2.2. Delarue's apology: timing, IFID, unrepentance

The explicit comment in the *Le Monde* article about the Delarue's apology for assaulting staff aboard a plane (see (33)) stresses the importance of timing and explicitness.

- (33) [Delarue for aggressive behaviour – Le Monde 03.04.07]
L'art consiste à s'excuser au bon moment. Franchement, carrément. [The skill consists of apologizing at the right time. Frankly, explicitly.]

(34), although it is not an explicit comment, indicates the media's negative evaluation of apologies issued primarily to avoid sanction or jail. This shows the media's disapproval of public apologies used by apologizers for their own benefit and in this particular instance indicates the newswriter's view that the sanction Jean-Luc Delarue received after his apology for his aggressive behaviour on board a plane was too lenient:

- (34) [Delarue for aggressive behaviour – Le Monde 03.04.07]
Ce geste a visiblement atteint son but. Jean-Luc Delarue, passible d'une peine d'un an d'emprisonnement pour avoir mordu un steward, en avoir injurié un autre et s'être laissé aller à des gestes déplacés sur une hôtesse de l'air, s'en est tiré avec une peine symbolique: un stage de citoyenneté de trois jours. Un tarif allégé ! [This act seems to have achieved its aim. Jean-Luc Delarue, who could have been jailed for one year for biting a steward, insulting another and behaving inappropriately towards a stewardess, got out of it with a symbolic sentence: a three-day citizenship course. A light tariff!]

This excerpt also highlights the paradox that public apologizers can be unrepentant and (as suggested above) can question interpretations of their actions as an offence.

4.3. Cross-cultural observations

Despite the rigour of the data collection, the smaller size of the French sub-corpus only allows cross-cultural 'observations' (i.e. full-blown cross-cultural pragmatic insights are not possible). This section draws on the analysis of the British and French corpora.

A first cross-cultural observation regards the fact that newswriters in both corpora seem to show little cross-cultural pragmatic awareness (i.e. little awareness that public apologies may be used and perceived differently across cultures). In both corpora, public apologizing, even when negatively framed, is largely assumed to be the 'right thing' (Nobles, 2003:9). Considering that some of the apology stories represented by the corpora involve national cultures other than Britain and France (e.g. the Japanese Prime Minister Abe's apology for WW2 sex slaves) and that the apology speech act has been found to have different uses in other cultures (e.g. Wagatsuma and Rosett, 1986), this lack of cross-cultural awareness is noteworthy. It can be interpreted as evidence of newswriters' possible monolithic outlook on public politeness—a perspective which recent politeness research has explicitly questioned. In that regard, Hickson's study (1986) is relevant for she contends that cultural subjects do not all stress apologies as a redressive technique in the same way and highlights that there are culture-specific ways of defining responsibility and formulating apologies. This first observation points to two inherent characteristics of public apologizing which are often overlooked: the fact that (i) the significance of public apologies varies across cultures and that (ii) there is danger of imposing one's own 'cultural' view on the degree of significance public apologies should have. It therefore appears that Renteln's comments about scholars may be extended to newswriters:

Even though scholars discuss the apology as though this term has the same meaning in every society around the world, this presumption of universality is unwarranted.
(Renteln, 2008:73).

Although these two small-scale specialized corpora do not allow me to claim that public apologies are definitely more frequently reported/used in Britain or France, the difference in size and in scope of these two corpora of apology press uptakes, along with my personal observations on apology press uptakes in Britain and France over the past ten years, do lead me to speculate that public apologies are less frequently reported in the French press than in the British and that public apologizing, as a social practice, public apologizing is embraced differently across the two national media cultures. In the same way that national cultures of scandal have different characteristics (Thompson, 2000), it seems that there are 'national cultures of accountability'. At least three explanations for French press's apparent lack of interest in public apologies can be put forward. First, it can be explained by exploring the wider context of public accountability (note that unless envisaged from a business perspective, public apologies are largely absent in the debate around 'public accountability'). In other words, it can be seen to primarily indicate that public apologies, and therefore the discourse of public accountability to which they belong, are judged as less newsworthy in the French press. Second, it may be seen as an indication that French press newswriters are prejudiced against public apologies. This reveals, for example, their view that public apologies are an ineffective means of addressing wrongdoing or indicating a view of public apology as a display of weakness. Third, it may be related to the fact that fewer public apologies are issued by French public figures.

The difference in corpora size and scope and the review of explicit comments indicate that the British and French media have distinct ways of perceiving and representing sociocultural sanctions associated with breaches of norm. Incidentally, these two national media cultures may also be seen to reflect the 'quickenings' and 'fragmentation' of public accountability discourse, particularly the 'inconsistencies in the differing logics that underlie [the very different] experiences' and visions of public accountability entertained by the many actors in contemporary governance systems (Dowdle, 2006:2; 10).

5. British newswriters' explicit beliefs about successful public apologies

The public apology felicity conditions model derives from the analysis of explicit comments in the British press, i.e. it is based on the analysis of the British sub-corpus. It consists of six tenets. The tenets are by no means fixed, exhaustive or in any way prescriptive of what public apologies should be (see Thomas who questions the rule-governed nature of speech acts 1995). Considering that several aspects of public apologies were sometimes exposed in the same article, these tenets are not mutually exclusive but can co-occur. Nor do these tenets attempt to reflect newswriters' indication that felicity conditions should be used in a particular way (e.g. all conditions should be met for the apology to be felicitous). There is no hierarchy among the felicity conditions (this echoes Jeffries' apology prototype model 2007). However, if we follow Turnbull's suggestion that 'felicity conditions are conventions that speakers and addressees use as a code to produce and recognize actions' (2003:50), it may be argued that the underlying assumption newswriters draw upon is that the more tenets a public apology has, the higher its chances of success. Indeed, the use of multiple tenets may be seen to evidence the apologizer's attempt to encode his/her apology in a way that will support the hearer in his/her decoding of the message as an apology. Conversely, it is apparent that some of these tenets cannot apply to certain public apologies (e.g. historical apologies are, by definition, not prompt). The model is as follows (Fig. 1):

- | | |
|-------|--|
| (i) | Public apologies should be performed by explicit apology expressions. |
| (ii) | Speakers should explicitly take personal responsibility for the offence or admit guilt. |
| (iii) | Speakers should be personally responsible for the apologized event. |
| (iv) | Public apologies should be prompt. |
| (v) | Public apologies should be delivered willingly. |
| (vi) | Public apologies may be undermined if:
A ... public figures perform their apologies by means of an expression of sorrow or regret;
B ... public figures use apologies for their own benefit. |

Fig. 1. British newswriters' overt public apology felicity conditions.

This data-driven model is now considered in the light of Olshtain and Cohen who take a functional approach (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Olshtain, 1989).

As might be expected, this model indicates that IFID and responsibility, also present in Olshtain and Cohen's apology model, are central to the views of newswriters on what constitutes a successful public apology (tenets (i); (ii) and (iii)). Tenets (iv), (v) and (vi) B may be considered to reflect the specificities of public apologies in particular. Tenet (v) A, on the other hand, can be seen to indirectly be relevant to Olshtain and Cohen's concern for the formulation of apologies (necessity to use an IFID to perform an apology). The model therefore reveals that newswriters partly uphold 'popular understandings of apologies as relatively well defined contextually and prototypically performative' (Jeffries, 2007:63) while indicating that professional newswriters are also in the process of developing their own sets of felicity conditions for public apologies, ones that reflect the inherently different nature of public apologies (see tenets (iv) and (v) and (vi) B) in comparison to private apologies (see tenets (i); (ii) and (iii)).

However, some of the newswriters' apparent beliefs about successful public apologies are also at odds with issues or aspects of public apologies recurrently discussed in apology press uptakes, media discussions on public apologies more generally and the public apology research literature. Particularly surprising is the absence of sincerity. Furthermore, the model contradicts the numerous public apologies breaching these rules daily and which are yet accepted as successful by the victims and the media (arguably the two main recipients of public apologies). Examples of breaches of this model include the fact that many public apologies, including many high profile public apologies, are issued only because there was a demand for an apology, for wrongs apologizers are not directly responsible for and/or following offences which may have happened in a very distant past.

The felicity conditions captured by this model can therefore be seen to indicate newswriters' inability to embrace the complexity of apologies, a point which Lakoff summarizes in a few words:

The [apologies] are hard to identify, define, or categorize, a difficulty that arises directly out of the functions they perform. Hence too, they occur in a range of forms from canonically explicit to ambiguously indirect; the functions served by those forms range from abject abasement for wrongdoing to, to conventional greasing of the social wheels, to expressions of sympathy, advance mollification for intended bad behavior, and formal public displays of currently 'appropriate' feelings'.
(Lakoff, 2001:201)

This model is evidence that 'all journalism is ultimately opinion journalism in that it is always possible to detect signs of authorial stance even in so-called 'hard-news reporting'' (Pounds, 2010:107). It illustrates the view that the media are 'the key for potential mis-understandings and mis-representations of both language and linguistics'. However, we may wonder what the mis-representation of public apologies in the press is on the general public's understanding of public accountability/apologies. This echoes Johnson and Ensslin (2007:3) and raises a series of important questions, concerning (i) the press' motivations and degree of awareness of their mis-representing successful public apologizing and (ii) the extent to which such media representations are central to the way we (experts of language and members of the general public alike) think apologies ought to be. Indeed, overt media presuppositions identified in this paper are likely to play a significant role in shaping the representation of successful public apologies, and hence contribute to biased framings of the wider discourse of public accountability. Considering that explicit comments are also characterized by negativity, continued exposure to this type of metapragmatic news discourse is likely to impact negatively on readers' perception of public apologies. Given the stakes involved in certain public apologies (e.g. those in conflict-resolution processes), the potential undermining effect of such media representations must be acknowledged, for media representations of what constitutes a successful public apology cannot be disassociated from the news discourse of which they are part.

6. Conclusion

In addition to furthering our understanding of their prototypical concept of public apology, newswriters' scripts identifying successful public apologies give us an invaluable insight into the local linguistic ideologies of the British press,

ideologies which encapsulate judgments which frame discourses of public accountability. Overall, the paper reveals that British newspapers adhere to (and want to be perceived to be adhering to) standard folklinguistic views of apologies based on morality. However, although focus on apologies as essentially moral acts is common, it overlooks the fact that public apologies can serve to advance goals other than moral, e.g. political (Nobles, 2003:11 on political apologies).

More generally, the present corpus-assisted discourse analytic investigation into the language of explicitly evaluative metapragmatic comments in British and French apology press uptakes indicates how subjectivity permeates even the most objective forms of news discourse: hard news reporting. The validity of public apology press uptakes (a type of 'metalinguistic' data) as a source of evidence to further our understanding of public apology processes is apparent. This supports, *inter alia*, Thomas (1995) and Davies (2001:189–190)'s view that a greater range of sources of evidence and greater focus on addressee evaluations constitute a positive move for speech act research. This uncovers an important facet of public apologies, namely the non-dyadic pattern of sociation in public apologetic discourse.⁶

The tentative claims concerning culture-specific characteristics of apology media uptakes suggest that French and British newswriters' beliefs about successful public apologies fail to account for the specificities and diversity of public apologies. Full-blown investigations into possible cross-cultural variations in apology press uptakes therefore seem timely.

It is worth noting that many of the questions we have about public apologies are being answered by ongoing research both within and outside linguistics, some focusing on very specific technology-bound kinds of public apologies (e.g. Page, 2014 on corporate apologies posted on Twitter). I believe the examination of other apology uptakes in the print and broadcast media, and the study of opinion-led apology press uptakes (e.g. editorials, leading articles, comments articles, debate articles or opinion articles bearing on public apologies) seem opportune. This would highlight the extent to how they differ in representing what makes a successful public apology. Furthermore, since category blurring in speech acts is an under-researched phenomenon, more pragmatic and discourse analytic research on media uptakes of public speech acts might also be timely.

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⁶ This supports Tavuchis's (1991) views on the triadic nature of public apologetic discourse. What is noticeable in the discussion of third parties in public apologies is the dominance of the media, as shown by their privileged position in accessing public discourse and communication (on the notion of access in discourse, see van Dijk, 1996).

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Dr. Clyde Ancarno completed her PhD in 2011 at the Centre for Language and Communication Research of Cardiff University. Her areas of research specialization are Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics. She is currently working at King's College London (Centre for Language, Discourse and Communication) as a Research Associate on the 'People', 'Products', 'Pests' and 'Pets': the discursive representation of animals project which uses a corpus-assisted discourse analysis methodology to investigate the language, production and reception of texts about animals in contemporary Britain. Her research interests also include language and communication in culturally diverse workplaces (particularly in the context healthcare and tourism) and interreligious discourse.